

SPECIFICATION

TITLE

"METHOD AND CIRCUIT ARRANGEMENT FOR DRIVING LASER DIODES"

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

The invention is in the field of electronic reproduction technology and is directed to a method and a circuit arrangement for driving laser diodes arranged in close proximity to one another, for example on a common carrier, in laser recording devices, whereby the term laser recording devices is intended to include laser exposers, laser printers and digital printing machines, among others.

In a laser recording device, a laser beam modulated by a video signal is conducted point-by-point and line-by-line across a recording material that is clamped on a materials' holder movable relative to the laser beam.

Multi-beam recording elements are employed for increasing the recording speed. A multi-beam recording element comprises a plurality of individually controllable laser diodes that generate a plurality of parallel laser beams for the recording.

Strip-shaped laser diode arrangements, what are referred to as laser diode bars, are frequently employed, these being respectively composed of a plurality of laser diodes arranged in close proximity on a shared substrate carrier that have individually electrically drivable emitters.

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Since the light power output by the laser diodes is highly temperature-dependant, the heating of a laser diode -- due to the extremely slight spacings of the laser diodes on the substrate carrier -- can disturbingly influence the temperatures of neighboring laser diodes and, thus, their light power, an effect that is referred to as thermal crosstalk. Due to the slight spacings of the laser beams from one another, further, neighboring laser beams can mutually influence one another, an effect that is called optical crosstalk. The recording quality of a laser recording device is considerably deteriorated due to such crosstalk.

For crosstalk compensation in laser diode arrangements, it is known to either keep the working temperature of the individual laser diodes constant by heating and cooling or to keep the light powers output by the laser diodes constant by regulating their driver currents.

EP 0 738 071 B discloses a method for the operation of a laser diode arrangement wherein correction signals are formed by weighting selected video signals with weighting coefficients stored in a table memory (look-up table; LUT). For the purpose of a crosstalk compensation, the video signals are corrected by the correction signals and the corrected video signals are then converted into the driver currents for the laser diodes.

The known method does not take into consideration that the thermal crosstalk is dynamic, i.e. that the temperature influencing on neighboring diodes occurs with a time curve. For this reason, the known method is not suited for being utilized for fast modulation of the laser beams in a laser recording device.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

It is therefore an object of the present invention to improve a method and a circuit arrangement for driving laser diodes arranged in close proximity in a laser recording device such that thermal and optical crosstalk of the laser diodes are dynamically compensated.

According to the method and apparatus of the invention for driving laser diodes arranged in close proximity to one another in a laser recording device, each laser diode is charged by a driver current that determines a light power output by the laser diode. With the driver currents, controlling video signals modulated with information to be recorded are controlled. A first correction unit is connected between a first laser diode forming a crosstalk source and a second laser diode forming a crosstalk sink. The correction unit is charged with the video signal or the driver current of the first laser diode. The correction unit is connected with the video signal or the driver current of the first laser diode. An output signal of the correction unit is employed as a correction signal for the video signal or for the driver current of the second laser diode. A transfer function of the correction unit is determined such that an optimum compensation of crosstalk is achieved between the laser diodes.

The invention is explained in greater detail below with reference to Figures 1 through 4.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Figure 1 is a schematic illustration of a multi-beam recording element;

Figure 2 is an exemplary embodiment of a drive circuit;

Figure 3 shows time curves, for example explaining a crosstalk compensation; and

Figure 4 is another exemplary embodiment of a drive circuit.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Figure 1 shows a schematic exemplary embodiment of a multi-beam recording element in a laser recording device. The multi-beam recording element essentially comprises a drive circuit 1, a laser beam generator 2, an optical lens 3 and an objective 4. The laser beam generator 2 is designed as a strip-shaped laser diode arrangement, called a laser diode bar in brief. The strip-shaped laser diode arrangement is composed of a plurality -- five in the illustration -- of laser diodes 5 arranged in a row and spaced from one another. The laser diodes 5, whose emitters can be individually driven with the drive circuit 1, are located on a common substrate carrier 6. The substrate carrier 6 is arranged such that the laser beams 7 generated by the laser diodes 5 emerge from the laser beam generator 2 parallel to an optical axis 8 of the multi-beam recording element.

The optical lens 3 in front of the laser beam generator 2 is designed as an aspherical lens, for example a cylindrical meniscus lens, whose longitudinal extent is directed perpendicular to the optical axis 8. An asymmetrical beam expansion transverse to the optical axis 8 is compensated by the cylindrical meniscus lens 3.

The objective 4 is arranged on the optical axis 8 at that side of the optical lens 3 facing away from the laser beam generator 2. The objective 4 forms the

individual light exit faces of the laser diodes 5 in the required scale as a row of illumination points 9 on the recording material 10 of the laser recording device (not shown in greater detail). The illumination points 9 generate illumination lines lying side-by-side on the recording material 10 due to a relative movement between recording material and multi-beam recording element.

Figure 2 shows an exemplary embodiment of a drive circuit 1 for the laser beam generator 2 that is designed as a strip-shaped laser diode arrangement (laser diode bar) according to Figure 1. For the sake of clarity, only three specific laser diodes (5_A , 5_B , 5_C) of the laser diode arrangement are shown for three channels A, B and C in Figure 2. The illustrated arrangement is repeated correspondingly given more channels.

The channels A, B and C comprise controllable current sources 12_A , 12_B , 12_C for generating the driver currents I_{TA} , I_{TB} , I_{TC} for the laser diodes 5_A , 5_B , 5_C with a respective control input $12'_A$, $12'_B$, $12'_C$ and a correction input $12''_A$, $12''_B$, $12''_C$.

Analog or digital video signals V_A , V_B and V_C that are modulated with the information to be recorded are supplied to the control inputs $12'_A$, $12'_B$, $12'_C$ of the current sources 12_A , 12_B , 12_C and control the light powers P_A , P_B and P_C of the laser diodes 5_A , 5_B , 5_C via the driver currents I_{TA} , I_{TB} , I_{TC} .

As already explained, the working temperature of a laser diode (crosstalk source) in one of the channels influences the working temperatures of the laser diodes (crosstalk sink) in the neighboring channels time-delayed by thermal crosstalk as a result of the laser diodes lying in such close proximity to one

another and, due to the dependency of the light power on the working temperature, also influences the light powers output by the laser diodes. Additionally, the light power can be influenced by optical crosstalk of the laser beams.

In Figure 2, for example, the working temperature of the laser diode 5_A in the channel A influences the working temperature of the laser diode 5_B in the neighboring channel B, and the working temperature of the laser diode 5_B in the channel B influences the corresponding working temperatures of the laser diodes 5_A , 5_C in the neighboring channels A and C.

The disruptive thermal and optical crosstalk of the channels onto neighboring channels is compensated according to the invention by electronic feedback of correction signals K onto at least the immediately neighboring channels. The correction signals K for neighboring channels are acquired from the video signal V or from the driver current I_T of the channel lying between the neighboring channels. The acquisition of the correction signals K occurs with linear or non-linear quadripoles whose transfer functions correspond to the time curves of the temperature $T = f(t)$ or the light power $P = f(t)$ in at least the immediately neighboring channels caused by the crosstalk.

The method of the invention is explained by way of example for the crosstalk compensation of the channel A onto the neighboring channel B.

Before the crosstalk compensation, the time curve of the temperature $T_B = f(t)$ or the time curve of the light power $P_B = f(t)$ in the neighboring channel B is determined, this deriving due to the crosstalk effect from channel A onto

In the crosstalk compensation, a correction signal K_{AB} is then generated in the first correction unit 14 from the video signal V_A or, respectively, from the driver current I_{TA} , the correction signal being forwarded to the correction input $12''_B$ of the current source 12_B for the correction of the driver current I_{TB} . The correction signal K_{AB} corresponds to the time change of the temperature or of the light power in the channel B dependent on the video signal V_A or on the driver current I_{TA} of the channel A. The correction signal K_{AB} corrects the driver current of the laser diode 5_B in the channel B in such a way that the drop of the light power P_B in the channel B caused by the crosstalk is compensated, whereby the relationship between driver current and light power is assumed to be approximately linear.

In the drive circuit 1 shown in Figure 2, moreover, a correction signal K_{BA} acting from channel B onto channel A is acquired in a second correction unit 15, a correction signal K_{BC} acting from channel B onto channel C is acquired in a third correction unit 16, and a correction signal K_{CB} acting from the channel C onto channel B is acquired in a fourth correction unit 17.

Time diagram A) shows the rectangular curve of the light power P_A in the channel A during the on-time interval of the laser diode 5_A.

resulting due to the crosstalk from channel A. The drop in light power caused by the crosstalk can be seen.

Time diagram C) shows the correction signal K_{AB} generated for the channel B for the compensation of the crosstalk from channel A onto channel B.

Time diagram D) shows the curve of the driver current I_{TB}^* for the laser diode 5_B in the channel b corrected with the correction signal K_{AB} .

The time diagram E) shows the curve of the light power P_B of the laser diode 5_B in the channel B after the crosstalk compensation, the disruptive drop in light power having now been eliminated.

In the exemplary embodiment of a drive circuit () shown in Figure 2, the crosstalk from one channel onto the immediately neighboring channels is compensated.

It lies within the scope of the invention to expand the crosstalk compensation onto more distant channels, for example to compensate the crosstalk of channel A not only in the immediately neighboring channel B but also in the more distant channel C.

Figure 4 shows portions of a drive circuit 1 for an expanded crosstalk compensation. For additional compensation of the crosstalk from channel A onto channel C, the illustrated drive circuit 1 comprises a further correction unit 18 in which the time curve of the temperature $T_C = f(t)$ of the laser diode 5_C or of the light power $P_C = f(t)$ in the channel C as a result of a temperature change of the laser diode 5_A is simulated. Dependent on the driver current I_{TA} , the correction unit 18 generates an additional correction signal K_{AC} that is supplied

to the current source 12_c for the correction of the driver current I_{TC} for the laser diode 5_c.

Although various minor modifications might be suggested by those skilled in the art, it should be understood that my wish to embody within the scope of the patent warranted hereon all such modifications as reasonably and properly come with the scope of my contribution to the art.

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